Material philology

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1 Definition

Material philology designates a branch in philological studies that focuses on the material characteristics of written artefacts, rather than studying them solely as carriers of linguistic texts. Instead of striving to reconstruct the original state of a text, material philology is interested in the transmission of texts in time depth and values them as material manifestations of changing cultural contexts. The term 'New Philology' was first introduced by Stephen Nichols in the widely influential, eponymous special issue of *Speculum* in 1990. Later on, Nichols himself suggested the alternative designation of 'Material Philology' (1997).

In the context of Old Norse studies, material philology has gained ground over the past twenty years. In an attempt to further emphasise the focus on the manuscripts as material artefacts, Matthew Driscoll (2010) and Anne Mette Hansen (2012) suggested the alternative term of 'Artefactual Philology'. The study of individual manuscripts that has always had a strong tradition within Old Norse studies gained further momentum with the introduction of Nichols's ideas, as can be seen from numerous recent preoccupations with the compilation and codicological characteristics of individual manuscripts. Also influenced by the ideas of new and material philology, the post-medieval manuscript tradition has likewise received considerable attention over the past years.

2 State of research

Over the past fifteen years, several studies of compilations have been – mostly implicitly – informed by notions of memory, most notably in the case of prominent manuscripts such as *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.), *Hauksbók* (today archived in three volumes: AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to, AM 675 4to) and *Möðruvallabók* (AM 132 fol.). These compilations have been studied as manifestations of memories of different, more or less identifiable communities, with more or less identifiable purposes. *Hauksbók* has been characterised as private library (e.g. Gunnar Harðarson and Stefán Karlsson 1993; Hempel 2001), as encyclopaedia (e.g. Simek 1990, 377–383) and as "material testament of [Haukr's] learning and knowledge" (Ashman Rowe 2008, 73; see also Sverrir Jakobsson 2007). *Flateyjarbók* has been approached as *Gedenkbuch* [memorial book] (Zernack 1999) and "gift with an

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implied purpose, that of encouraging the king to follow the example of his revered namesake" (Ashman Rowe 2005, 23). Explicitly linking to concepts of memory, Claudia Müller (2001, 225) interpreted the compilation of *Möðruvallabók* as a witness of individual and social memory. Most recently, Laura Sonja Wamhoff studied Icelandic compilations of the fourteenth century from a memory-theoretical perspective as media for the construction of identity, differentiating between literature of identification (e.g. *Möðruvallabók*) and dissociation (e.g. *Flateyjarbók*) (Wamhoff 2016, 222).

These studies are preoccupied with a synchronic perspective on the construction of memory, taking the compilations as a snapshot at a specific point in time, in a specific, more or less identifiable context. But diachronic studies of the transmission of individual texts have also touched on issues of memory, in the discussion of the *mouvance* (for this concept, see Zumthor 1972, 84–96) of texts, and also in discussing in what manuscripts and in what period individual texts are transmitted. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe (2002) points out that the Icelandic annals exhibit a multilayered construction of memory, both from manuscript to manuscript – from annal to annal – and within the individual manuscripts, with additions in different hands throughout the complete timeframe of the annalistic work. Another prominent and widely discussed case that deals with questions related to the construction of memory is Patricia Boulhosa's study of the transmission of *Gamli sáttmáli* [Old Covenant], a text traditionally understood as a mutual agreement between the Norwegian king and the Icelanders in 1262/64. The transmission – which sets in at the end of the fifteenth century – combined with historical-critical readings of the text leads her to classify this core document of Icelandic identity in its extant form as a fifteenth-century reconstruction, rather than as a witness from the time of the submission (Boulhosa 2005, 110–153).

Recent research in other disciplines has directed attention to praxeological aspects, to the making, using and keeping of written artefacts. The field of praxeology is rather unexplored within Old Norse studies. As a first attempt, in an article on the copying of sagas in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir (2006) explored the keeping of manuscripts as memory-related activity: "Bevidst opbevaring af manuskripter vidner om en bestemt brug af fortiden som en fælles erindring, noget som kunne påvirke valget af, hvilke skrifter der blev bevaret, og hvilke ikke." (Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir 2006, 292) [Conscious storage of manuscripts witnesses a certain use of the past as collective memory, something that could influence the decision of which texts were preserved and which were discarded. (author's translation)]

3 Pre-modern Nordic material

It seems promising to further investigate the arrangement and keeping of texts as a materialisation of memory-related processes. Such a perspective embraces both the material arrangement of a text on a material carrier – a codex, a document, a scroll – but also the arrangement of these carriers in space – in libraries and archives. A hitherto virtually unploughed field in the pre-modern Icelandic context is the making, collecting and keeping of administrative and legal documents. Most of the original Icelandic charters handed down to us were kept at the two episcopal archives of Hólar and Skálholt. Over the centuries, these documents were stored and organised according to changing practices that might provide insights into underlying memory concepts (see also Aleida Assmann 2011, 327–330). In particular, the making and arrangement of church inventories (*máldagabækur*) and cartularies (*bréfabækur*) seem fruitful objects in that context. These books gather transcriptions of a large number of individual documents that in many cases are not extant in the original. The advent of these books in the Icelandic tradition in the fourteenth century coincides with a considerable increase of administrative literacy in the same period and mirrors new needs of storage and organisation arising from the ever-growing number of documents (see Rohrbach 2014, 256–257; Sigurdsson 2012). A particularly interesting case is an account book of Hólar (Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands, Bps B II 1). This book was begun early in the fourteenth century and features texts in several hands from different temporal layers between 1300 and 1450. The account book of Hólar contains a variety of texts, in particular lists of property rights of the episcopal see, partially with notes on when and from whom these rights were aquired. Several of the scribal hands have been identified with *officiales* of the episcopal see, among them Jón Egilsson, the most prominent administrative scribe in late-medieval Iceland with pronounced archival endeavours (see Rohrbach 2014, 244; Stefán Karlsson 1963, xlv). Thus, the account book can be approached as a materialisation of the administrative memory of the episcopal see over several generations.

Legal memory in the narrower sense was also kept and transmitted in codices. Some of these manuscripts exhibit continuous additions of new legal texts in hands from different times, but most of the codices are comprehensive compilations from the outset with only minor subsequent additions. Following the acceptance of Bishop Árni's Church Law (*Kristinréttr Árna biskups*) in 1275 and the promulgation of the secular law code *Jónsbók* in 1281, these law texts were written down in many copies and compiled with a changing selection of shorter legal texts such as royal amendments, ecclesiastic statutes or decisions of the Althing. Some of the manuscripts exhibit extensive marginal notations that reveal intense studies of the texts, such as *Skálholtsbók yngri* (AM 354 fol.,

c. 1400), amongst others again in the hand of Jón Egilsson (see colour plate 14). In particular, the writing down of legal key words and several series of different types of pointing fingers in a number of manuscripts can be read collectively as an "ocular gateway to memory and meditation" (Carruthers 2008, 314), as material traces of memory practices.

The Icelandic legal manuscripts also present a rare opportunity for studies of the transition between communicative and cultural memory in bygone times. In most cases, the additions consist of new amendments to the legal code or of recent local charters. These additions were literally inscribed into the legal corpus in a first manuscript. In the subsequent transmission, these additions were either taken up and handed down together with the rest of and as part of the legal corpus, or also they disappeared again, implying that – in that case – they did not transition into the cultural memory. These compilations, and in particular the recent elements in them, might thus be read as material traces, as gateway to the *floating gap*, to the span between communicative and cultural memory that in oral societies forms a proper unremembered timespan, which is shifting from generation to generation (Jan Assmann 2010, 112).

Moreover, not all of the compiled texts had the status of applicable law when they were first included in the codices, but the subsequent copying of these texts, as well as late-medieval and early modern court protocols, testify that the insertion of these texts had sustainable consequences for the constitution of the legal corpus (Rohrbach 2014, 249–250).

4 Perspectives for future research

The legal compilations might thus be approached not only as transmission, but also as active formations of the legal memory of late medieval Iceland. The rewritings in the Icelandic legal manuscripts can be approached as negotiations of the legal canon that at the same time bear the inherent quality of an archive. The archive has been an influential concept both – but not only – in literacy and in memory studies over the past two decades. The current notions of archive hover between a material understanding of the archive as concrete, spatial storage and a Foucauldian understanding of the archive as the totality of discursive possibilities at a given time (Foucault 1972, 128–131). Both Mary Franklin-Brown (2012) and Martin Irvine (1991) in their preoccupation with pre-modern textuality discussed the potentials of this double-layered quality of the notion of archive, and Franklin-Brown denoted the manuscript as a material archive that allows insights into the discursive archive (Franklin-Brown 2012, 30).

This understanding of the manuscript as material crystallisation of the discursive archive of a given time allows for a link with the notion of archive in memory studies. In a series of articles, Aleida Assmann establishes the distinction between an actively circulated and a passively stored memory, between a cultural working memory and a cultural reference memory, and denoted these two types of memory as canon and archive, respectively (A. Assmann 2010, 98). Assmann stresses that the cultural memory of oral societies is restricted to the canon, to the working memory, while the archive, the reference memory, is dependent on the externalisation of knowledge as it was made possible with the introduction of literacy. The memory archive is a storage that prevents knowledge from oblivion while at the same time not participating in the active working memory (A. Assmann 2010, 102–104). Assmann's memory archive thus draws both on the material notion of archive and on the Foucauldian discursive pool that one – the active canon – might refer to.

Manuscript cultures and pre-modern textuality challenge Assmann's dichotomic distinction between canon and archive. The making of every single manuscript implies a movement – a *mouvance* – between canon and archive in that texts are taken up and dismissed. Manuscripts allow for variant readings within the canon: they are polyphonic snapshots of a canon while at the same time turning into archives for future formations of the canon. They inscribe themselves into an intertextual web of references back and forth in time. Thus, the relationship between canon and archive is a fluent one, and every manuscript can be read, at the same time, as both materialisation of the canon and accumulation of the archive.

Legal manuscripts form a special case of these textual archives because of the normative status of effective law. In compiling and conflating the secular and ecclesiastical law in effect with texts of varying origin and legal status and presenting them as a coherent material text, the manuscripts represent contestations of the current legal corpus and suggestions for reformulations of this canon. The individual challenges of the legal canon, the individual suggestions of what the law should look like, turned into textual archives that other scribes, influenced and steered by the materiality of the codices, in turn used in the production of their new manuscripts.

Pre-modern Nordic manuscript transmission offers considerable material for future studies of this *mouvance* between canon and archive. One fruitful object of research might be to investigate the active and passive dismissal of memory from the archive. This could be achieved through studying palimpsests and maculation, that is, the active erasure and destruction of memory – or censorship – or by investigating discontinuities and disruptions in the transmission of individual texts over time, that is, the 'passive' omission of texts from new formations of the archive.

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